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Études/Inuit/Studies, vol. 31, n°1-2, 2007, p. 59-81.

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DOI: 10.7202/019715ar

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The end of “Eskimo land”: Yupik relocation in Chukotka, 1958-1959

Igor Krupnik* and Mikhail Chlenov**

Résumé: La fin de la «Terre eskimo»: relocalisation yupik en Tchoukotka

Il y a cinquante ans, pendant l'été 1958, les autorités russes ont entrepris un programme de relocalisation massive de la population yupik de la péninsule des Tchouktches en Sibérie. Quelques 800 personnes, ou environ 70% de cette petite nation de 1100 individus à l'époque, ont été forcées de quitter leur lieu de résidence et ont été transférées vers d'autres communautés. L'essentiel des faits relatifs à la relocalisation yupik est connu depuis les années 1960 mais aucun récit de première main n'a jamais été publié. Cet article présente une vue d'ensemble de la fermeture des trois plus grands villages yupik sibériens, Naukan, Ungaziq (Chaplino) et Plover en 1958-1959 ainsi que du déplacement de leurs résidents, à travers leurs souvenirs et leurs récits personnels que les auteurs ont recueillis durant les années 1970 et 1980. L'article soutient que ces relocalisations yupik par les autorités soviétiques dans les années 1950 ont été sans précédent en terme d'échelle et d'effet traumatisant, même si on les compare aux programmes de repeuplement initiés par d'autres États qui visaient de nombreuses communautés inuit en Alaska, au Canada et au Groenland.

Abstract: The end of “Eskimo land”: Yupik relocation in Chukotka, 1958-1959

Fifty years ago, in summer 1958, Russian authorities started a program of massive relocation of the Yupik population on the Chukchi Peninsula, Siberia. About 800 people, or roughly 70% of the small nation of 1,100 at that time, were forced to leave their home sites and were moved to other communities. Some basic facts related to the Yupik relocations of the 1950s have been known since the 1960s; but no first-hand narratives of the displaced people were ever published. The paper overviews the closing of the three largest Siberian Yupik communities of Naukan, Ungaziq (Chaplino) and Plover in 1958-1959, and the displacement of their residents as recalled from their memories and personal accounts collected by the authors during the 1970s and 1980s. The paper argues that Soviet Yupik relocations of the 1950s were unprecedented in their scale and traumatic impact, even when compared to other state-initiated resettlement programs that targeted many Inuit communities in Alaska, Canada and Greenland.

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Introduction

This paper is a somber contribution to a forgotten anniversary. Fifty years ago, in summer 1958, the Soviet authorities launched a program of massive relocation of the Yupik (Asiatic, or Siberian Eskimo) population of the Chukchi Peninsula, Siberia. Age-old Native villages were officially “closed”; family homes were hastily abandoned; and most of the people’s property and personal belongings were left behind. Altogether, about 800 people were forced to leave their original sites and were moved to other communities in two years. Over the next five decades people subjected to relocations, their children, even grandchildren had to cope with the memories of the life once shattered and with the threats of further resettlements ever to follow.

Of course, the Yupik people in Chukotka were not the only Indigenous Arctic residents to be moved (or, rather, displaced¹) by the state. Other Arctic powers—U.S., Canada, Denmark, Norway—were also engaged in various resettlement/relocation activities at that very time. Nor was the program of the Yupik relocations somewhat exceptional in Russia’s recent history. In the 1930s and 1940s, millions of Soviet citizens had been moved around the country as deportees, political convicts, and forced labourers, including many large ethnic groups (like the Chechen, Volga Germans, Kalmyk, and other) that were uprooted from their native areas and exiled during and after World War II. In fact, Yupik relocations in the 1950s proceeded with no reported violence and have been undertaken under rather benign premises of economic modernisation, better housing, and services for Indigenous people. Nevertheless, they ended up in the destruction of the Yupik system of residence and community social network, as it had existed since the early contact era and up to the mid-20th century.

The full story of the Yupik relocations in the 1950s was never publicly disclosed by the Soviet/Russian sources². Although the closing of the Yupik communities—and of dozens of other Indigenous villages across the Russian North—was well known to the locals, it was quickly veiled in secrecy. No accounts of the relocations and their social consequences were allowed to be published in Russia, except for a few references to the very fact that people were displaced from their native sites (Krupnik and Chlenov 1979: 27; Leont’iev 1973: 32; Menovshchikov 1959: 124)³. Western anthropologists were aware of the basic facts related to the Yupik relocations since the 1970s (Chichlo 1981; Hughes

¹ In this paper we use the term “resettlement” when speaking about the assisted migration that is *encouraged* by the state; the “relocation” means an *enforced* move, when people are pressed to change residence by government decree or policy. An extreme case is “deportation,” when a migration is carried out by the actions or presence of the police or military units.

² The only known public response to Yupik relocations of the 1950s was an apologetic fictional novel called *Nunivak* (Rytkeu 1963). It describes a happy life in newly relocated communities despite the intrigues of some grumpy “traditionalists,” who are eventually defeated.

³ Leont’iev’s (1973: 32) calling the closure of Naukan in 1958 a “premature and ill-advised action” was the strongest condemnation published in Russia prior to 1988. In the 1970s, Leont’iev made several public and written appeals on behalf of the deported residents of Naukan (all unpublished), as also did Menovshchikov and the authors, to no avail. At the same time, the translated popular accounts on the relocation of the Caribou Inuit in Canada (Mowat 1963a, 1963b) and of the Thule Inuit in Greenland (Maurie 1973), were printed in Russia in thousands of copies.

1984; Krauss 1973, 1974, 1994). Nonetheless, no first-hand reports were available and the lack of proper documentation has long been lamented (Schweitzer 1997: 402).

When we first visited Chukotka in 1971, the memories of the relocations were very much alive and quite painful. During our fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s, we were able to collect many first-hand narratives that are cited below⁴. All of the people we interviewed have since passed away (see "Acknowledgements" section). There are, perhaps, a few dozen survivors with a personal memory of the events, who were young people or teens in the 1950s. All of them should be over 60 years of age or more. Their numbers, as well as the overall body of memories about the former Yupik life prior to relocations are rapidly shrinking (Krupnik and Mikhailova 2006: 104-107). Recently, the documentation of Indigenous relocations in the Arctic through people's narratives on the events received new momentum (*e.g.*, Csonka 1995; Kohlhoff 1995; Marcus 1992, 1995; Tester and Kulchyski 1994), including a new international study (Klein et al. 2008). Our paper is a contribution to this broad effort. It presents the story of the closing of the three largest Siberian Yupik communities of Naukan, Ungaziq (Chaplino) and Plover in 1958-1959, as seen via memoirs and first-hand accounts of its former residents. We hope that such personal recollections, accompanied by the authors' comments, will be of value to today's researchers who, otherwise, may not have insight on the events of half a century ago.

Historical background

The first state-initiated Yupik resettlement in Siberia took place in 1926, when 10 Yupik families were moved from Provideniya Bay to the remote Wrangell Island, some 1000 miles away in the northern Chukchi Sea. That migration was a pure political venture (Barr 1977; Ushakov 1972); it was aimed at supporting Russia's territorial claims to the island by establishing a permanent local colony. The Yupik were actually *invited* to move with an offer of state assistance; they were transported by a state icebreaking ship, like in a similar Danish attempt at Scoresby Sound in East Greenland in 1925 or in the Canadian effort to place Inuit families to the High Arctic in the 1950s (Barr 1977; Jenness 1964; Marcus 1992; 1995; Tester and Kulchyski 1995). In the 1930s, Soviet authorities encouraged five Yupik families to move to Big Diomed Island, when most of its residents flew to Little Diomed across the Russian-U.S. border (Krupnik 1994: 70).

The first time a Russian Yupik village was "closed" by the authorities and its residents were forced to move to another place happened in 1941, when a gun battery was positioned at the village of Avan to defend the nearby Russian port in Provideniya

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This paper is an abridged version of a more extensive overview of the Yupik relocations presented in an unpublished manuscript on the history of the Yupik people (Krupnik and Chlenov 1996). The manuscript written in 1987-1992 is based upon the interviews and field notes collected by the authors during the 1970s and 1980s.

Bay against prospective Japanese attack. The 40-some Avan Yupik community was relocated to the village of Ureliki (Ugriileq), inside the bay (Krupnik 2000: 70, 499).

Since the late 1930s, the Soviet administrators also started to encourage Native people to move from smaller villages and camps to larger communities; that, again, was a typical policy in Siberia and across the Arctic zone in general. In the 1940s and early 1950s, the efforts to move Indigenous residents from smaller villages and nomadic camps to larger communities became increasingly aggressive, particularly with regard to the inland reindeer herders (Gray 2005: 93-95; Kerttula 2000: 26-27). Several dozen villages in Chukotka, both Yupik and Chukchi, were closed and their residents were relocated to a few selected "hubs" destined to become modern settlements. As a result, between 1937 and 1953, the overall number of Native coastal villages on the Chukchi Peninsula was reduced from 90 to 31, or by a factor of three (SACAR 1939: 3-16; Selitrennik 1965). The number of Native village councils dropped from 31 in 1945 to 13 in 1955 (SACAR 1953: 1; Svedeniia 1946: 35). Of eight Yupik or mixed Yupik-Chukchi village councils only four remained.

The relocation of Avan in 1941 was soon followed by the closure of several other small Yupik settlements on the Chukchi Peninsula; all were undertaken with various levels of enforcement. In 1948, the remaining residents of Big Diomed Island (25-30) were moved to Naukan. The residents of the villages of Siqluk (8 families, 50 people) and Qiwaag (80 people, 14 families) were moved to Ungaziq in 1950 in 1952, respectively; and the people of Nutapelsen (around 40) were moved to the nearby village of Kaneergen around 1950. In 1948, the 70-some Yupik population of Ureliki was pushed to relocate to the community of Plover, due to the build-up of a large Russian military base at their home site (Krupnik 2000: 81-82, 501). In all of those cases, the authorities forced the move, although they had arranged it as if people voluntarily "unified" (merged) their villages and village councils with more prosperous larger settlements⁵.

Patterns of relocation

During the 1940s and 1950s, thanks to governmental subsidies and centralised supplies, all of the remaining Native villages in Chukotka were modernised. Most of the residents moved from old skin- and sod-covered houses into frame lumber buildings faced with boards and tarpaper and outfitted with iron stoves and home-made or purchased furnishings (Leont'iev 1973: 98-99; Smoliak 1957: 26-27). Village schools, small clinics, stores, radio-stations, and post offices were built. By 1955, the former Yupik area on the Chukchi Peninsula was split into five isolated enclaves that became modernised towns with 300-350 residents each: Ungaziq (also called Chaplino), Naukan (Nuvuqaq in Yupik), Sireniki (Sighiineq), Plover (Aslleq), and Uelkal (Wellkela)

⁵

On one day, 25th of December 1952, the local governing body—the Executive Committee of the Chukotka National Region—stamped in Anadyr 10 petitions on the dissolution of 12 Native village councils in Chukotka, both Yupik and Chukchi, in connection with the village closings. They were all dubbed "non-existent" and "voluntarily unified" (SACAR 1952: 170).

(SACAR 1952, 1; Krupnik and Chlenov 1996)⁶. Though predominately Yupik, each town also had a growing number of Chukchi, Russian, and mixed families. Three villages, Ungaziq, Naukan, and Sireniki/Sighiinek, were historical communities known from the pre-contact era; the two latter towns, Plover and Uelkal, were established in the early 1900s (Krupnik 1983). Despite many changes brought by the Soviet-era modernisation, the communities of the 1950s retained, to a certain extent, Yupik marine hunting economy and social life based upon kin network and mutual support. It was these last “pockets” of consolidated Yupik residence in Chukotka that were targeted by the authorities in the 1950s.

According to the Yupik accounts and records of the time, around 1952-1953, the district officials began to prepare residents of the two largest Yupik communities, Naukan (Yupik population about 300) and Ungaziq (Yupik population 250), for the changes to come. The visiting administrators staged numerous meetings at which they outlined plans for large-scale construction and pressed the inconvenience of both sites for the new way of life. The logic of the Russian administrators was often convincing. Naukan stood atop a steep cliff, where it would be hard to deliver equipment and move construction materials for modern housing. The village of Ungaziq (Chaplino) was located on a level spit, but it was constantly threatened by storms, high surf, and in addition, had little fresh water. The officials, reportedly, claimed that there was no point in modernising both villages—so, everyone would have to move. The typical line of their argumentation was presented in the address given by a certain Skvortsov, the Russian deputy chairman of the Chukotka National Region’s Executive Council, at the Naukan village general meeting in October 1957:

The majority of the people in your village still live in *yarangas* [skin-covered houses] that are cold and damp. And it is no accident that we raise the issue of new housing. But we still have to think about where and when to build. There are 49 houses on this cliff, and they need stoves. About 4.5 tons of concrete has to be brought up here by hand. This will be very hard for you to do without equipment. It is proper to raise the question of relocating the village, but we have to select a site where it would be easier to build. The old site where you are living now is a good spot for sea hunting. But you wouldn’t be losing it, you could still have a hunting base here. Some collective farms go 50-60 kilometres to hunt. So we now need to resolve the question of construction once and for all, and choose a site. Of course people are accustomed to where they were born and raised, but we also have to think about the future development of the collective farm. To be sure, a place like where you’re living now is hard on your health, especially the kids, who have to get to school (1957 meeting in CDA 1958: 73-74).

Of course, it cannot be ruled out that the security consideration, not mentioned publicly, was a critical factor in both cases. Both villages were located at the sites being the closest to the Soviet-American border in the Bering Strait. During the Cold War era, all communications with the Alaskan Natives across the Bering Strait were severed (Krauss 1994: 369); the movements of local residents in the Soviet “border area” were

⁶ By that time, small Yupik groups of 20-30 persons each also lived on Wrangell Island and in the regional hubs of Anadyr, Lavrentiya, and Provideniya. All were tiny pockets in large mixed communities dominated by the Russian newcomers.

closely monitored and increasingly restricted. The standard tactic widely used by the Soviet authorities in the 1930s and 1940s was to remove all of the residential population from the border zone altogether⁷, the pattern first applied in Chukotka in 1948, when a few Yupik families were forced to move from Big Diomed Island .

As the elders recalled, the arrival of district officials and the meetings they summoned to discuss the prospects for relocation created an atmosphere of uncertainty and wild rumours:

When we were still living in Naukan, [I remember] some expedition arrived, and we were told that there was a fault extending down from the mountains, and that this fault would reach our village. We have a creek there, the village council was on one side, and there was a ravine nearby. Well, the ravine collapsed and very many people died⁸. After that there was a meeting and we were told we'd have to relocate (Maria Kovan [Qavan] 1981).

I returned to Chaplino in 1954. At the time people were saying that the village was totally without water. We would go collect water from shallow pits on the surface outside the village which we had dug into the spit, and sometimes we would even get salt water. There was a lake there, one with fresh water, and in the winter we'd get ice from there, but for some reason no one brought water from it in the summer. Anyway, there was talk that there was a very small isthmus there, and that it was washing away, and at any moment the lake might join with the sea. Then there'd be practically no water at all. Someone brought this story from the district. Who, I don't know (Alexandra Sokolovskaya 1987)⁹.

Under the influence of persuasion and arguments put forth by the visiting officials, the people first came to terms that it was imperative to move to a new site. Then special committees were nominated to select a new site for future residence. The committees were made primarily of Native appointees—village council chairs, Communist Party members, Communist Youth League activists—who were obligated by their career to implement the decisions of the authorities. And it was they who were put to promote the idea of relocation among their kinsmen. To step up the pressure, the district authorities threatened to cut the financing, and routinely delayed construction of the new houses and repairing old ones in the village. Then the residents were presented with elaborate architectural outlines of a future village-to-be with the renditions of its modern buildings and streets¹⁰. Finally, when the residents consented to move, they were relocated to different places altogether.

⁷ As a result of many acts of deliberate population cleansing in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly in the Russian Far East, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia, the vast areas along the Soviet borderline were transformed into "closed" zones controlled by the military and border guards (Bugai 1989).

⁸ This report was not confirmed by any other sources.

⁹ In the translated excerpts of personal narratives we collected in the 1970s and 1980s, we try to preserve the original style and grammar of the storytellers to the extent possible. Full accounts can be found in Krupnik and Chlenov (1996).

¹⁰ We have seen some of these phantom architectural renderings in the State Archives of the Chukotka Autonomous Region.

Farewell to Naukan

The relocation scenario is particularly well documented in the case of the village of Naukan near Cape Dezhnev/East Cape (Leont'iev 1973: 31-32; Menovshchikov 1988: 2). Here, the relocation affected not just the largest Yupik community on the Russian side of Bering Strait but also a distinctive group with a separate language and cultural tradition¹¹. Still, by the 1940s, it was a regular Siberian Native village, with the standard institutions of Soviet rural administration. Its residents were loyal citizens, who were busy involved in the construction of the new "Soviet life," as seen from people's memoirs and visitors' accounts of the time (e.g., Smoliak 1957).

When the district authorities introduced the idea of relocation, they first appealed to the scenario of fusing the Naukan community and several neighbouring reindeer Chukchi camps into one village, as was a common practice of the time (Kerttula 2000). The Naukan village leaders were quick to recognise the advantages of a stronger multi-sector economy for the community, in which the larger Yupik group would still play the chief role. Nowhere in the minutes of the many Naukan village council meetings of 1954-1958 that we checked at the State Archives of the Chukotka Autonomous Region did we find evidence to any reservation on this account. The creation of a mixed maritime-reindeer herding community was conceived as a continuation of traditional partnership between the Yupik coastal people and the Chukchi inland herders, with some additional material blessings of the promised modern housing.

In 1954 the Naukan "all-town" (village) meeting approved a decision to relocate to the nearby village of Dezhnevo (Kengisqun), some 15 km southwest of Naukan (CDA 1958). That village with an old trading post known since the early 1900s (Rasmussen 1927: 361), had been recently abandoned by its Chukchi residents, who, under a similar pressure from the authorities, moved to the neighbouring community of Uelen. Still, the decision to relocate from Naukan was not arrived at easily. That was never stated openly; instead, the reservations were conveyed by other means:

At first they [the authorities] wanted to move Naukan to Kengisqun. But this didn't work out, because they [the residents of Naukan] refused. They said it's muddy there. At a meeting everyone spoke, standing up and saying that they didn't want to go there. It's muddy there, they said (Nina Akuen 1987).

Despite people's decision to move, no new houses had been built at either Naukan or Dezhnevo between 1955 and 1957. Most likely, by 1957 the provincial administration had been already leaning toward a different plan. As a result, the original pledge to build a new village in Dezhnevo was quite unexpectedly abandoned and in summer 1958 the residents of Naukan were relocated some 60 km away, to the Chukchi community of Nunyamo. The reasons why people were moved to a totally different site were presented in an almost "iconic" narrative (Menovshchikov 1988: 2). When the steamer with the construction materials for the new housing arrived in 1958,

¹¹ Chichlo (1981) called the closing of Naukan "*la fin d'une ethnie*" ('the death of a nation').

there was a great storm. Reportedly, the ship could not unload its cargo at the open coast off Dezhnev, and, instead, entered the nearest safe bay, where the freight was brought to shore. No labourers or equipment were available with which to move it to the selected construction site. Thus, the new village had to be built literally near the pile of unloaded boards. Still, it was no accident that the village of Nunyamo was very close to the district center of Lavrentiya, where the settlers were under the watchful eyes of the district authorities and at their easy reach.

According to the recollections of the former residents of Naukan, their relocation to Nunyamo was headlong and ill prepared, as if the authorities raced to complete it before the people could come to their senses. The move was carried out in summer 1958, barely in two months¹²:

The relocation was handled by the village council, by the board. I don't even remember who our leader was at the time. It completely slipped my mind. Many [people] were sent off by barge and by cutter. And we left on July 12 by a whaleboat. We went with one of Nunyamo whaleboats. Chenkau was the captain. Both their whaleboats and those from Naukan followed after us. Our whole family went [...]. I can't remember who else was with us. I remember crying the entire way, when I started weeping on the shore, I didn't look at anyone, only back, I looked back, and that was all. I didn't need anyone, I didn't talk to anyone (Nina Akuqen 1987).

Naukan was literally deserted:

In Naukan we lived in a lumber house, not in a *yaranga* [skin covered house]. And the houses, everything was left exactly as it had been. A lot of stuff was still there, barrels, all kinds of skillets, kerosene stove—we left absolutely everything. [...] Everyone said goodbye to Naukan in one's own way, before we left. There were still things going on when we left [...] [that] I don't know! Everything was in such a tizzy, all the packing. People didn't go to the graves to bid farewell, people fed their ancestors at home. And that was it [...] (Nina Akuqen 1987).

The pledge to preserve Naukan as a hunting camp was not kept. On November 20, 1958, the Chukchi District Executive Committee disbanded the Naukan village council and appended its former territory to the nearby Chukchi village of Uelen (SACAR 1958: 64). The Naukan collective farm had been closed even earlier. Thus, Naukan and the surrounding area were officially declared “uninhabited.” Shortly after, the border travel regulations were tightened and any access to Naukan, even for its former residents now in Nunyamo, was banned.

Virtually nothing in Nunyamo was made ready for the new arrivals and the relocation itself fell far short of the promise of the bright new village that had been pledged previously. Formerly, the Naukan Yupik community (population 293 in 1950) had hardly any ties with the Nunyamo Chukchi (only 134 in 1950); suddenly they were

¹² Russian anthropologist Sergei Arutyunov (pers. comm., 2007) visited Naukan in June 1958 and he did not recall any anxiety among its residents as a sign of pending relocation.

forced to live as one village of two different languages and traditions (Leont'iev 1973: 32). The Yupik accounts portray their ordeal:

We disembarked in Nunyamo from the whaleboat onto the shore, and there was nowhere for us to go. Then a house was vacated for us, and we moved in there together, the occupants had moved into another house. We had arrived to find unfinished houses. Nothing was plastered, and there was no stove. And we were put together, you know, in such huge families! [...] That's how we lived: our family, Gullguwyi's family, and Narngengaawen and her children; Imeqan's family; both Ayategen and Inghhelen; and Gotghergen, who was ill, was put in with us too. What did we do the first night we arrived? Absolutely nothing. First they figured out where we would work. I started working in the collective farm too. Construction was underway there. We carried boards in crews, mixed clay, and made plaster, we did everything. We also carried water. And later they took me on as the cook at the kindergarten (Nina Akuqen 1987).

The people quickly realised that they had been deceived. Some of the former residents of Naukan, including the past leaders of the disbanded village council, opted to join their relatives at the district capital of Lavrentiya, some 20 km from Nunyamo. This was the beginning of a dispersion of the Naukan people that continued for two generations. The response of the majority, however, was to weather for a few years in Nunyamo and to wait to be saved by a miracle. In the years following the relocation, that miracle rescue seemed to be the Pinakul Marine Hunting Station, a small state-supported facility a few kilometres off Nunyamo. The Pinakul Station repaired schooners, motorboats, and offered minor technical services to the nearby villages. Here a mixed village of some 140 Russian, Chukchi, and Naukan Yupik residents emerged; it seemed as, perhaps, the best chance for the Naukan people to gather again and even to re-build their community at another site.

Still, for most of the displaced residents of Naukan this was a tall order. In order to reassemble, they needed not only the permission of the authorities, but their assistance as well. All the same, a young Naukan schoolteacher by the name of Tasyan Tein (Teyen) risked an appeal to the Chairman of the Magadan Province Executive Committee (the Province Governor), to which the Chukotka Autonomous Region was then subjected. According to the versions of the story we heard in the 1970s (see also Menovshchikov 1988: 2), Tein penned a letter with a request to allow the Naukan people to leave Nunyamo and assist them in gathering in Pinakul. Tein's appeal submitted in 1967 was co-signed by several former residents of Naukan who were then living in Pinakul.

For the architects of the relocation, approval of Tein's petition and permitting the Naukan people to gather in Pinakul would have meant an admission of their past mistake and of the very real negative consequences of their policies. That was unacceptable to Soviet bosses. Instead, an investigating commission was sent to Pinakul; it accused Tein and his co-signatories of "bourgeois nationalism" (*ibid.*). In the height of desperation, two Naukan elders committed suicide. Tein himself was not formally charged, but was exiled to serve for a few years as a schoolteacher on remote Wrangell Island. Pinakul itself was quickly closed around 1969, and in 1977 Nunyamo was closed as well (Chichlo 1981: 38). The people of Naukan were set to search for a new residence—the second and, for many, the third time in less than 20 years.

The forsaken village of Naukan remained an exotic destination for the passing sailors and scientific teams. The authors first visited it in summer 1971. During our last visit in 1981, there was little to suggest that people had recently lived there (Figure 1). The heaps of garbage had disappeared, and the stone foundations of the houses were laid bare. The Russian polar station was abandoned. Over the decades after 1958, most of the relocated Naukan residents never had the chance to visit their old site, with the exception of a few families who settled in the nearby Chukchi village of Uelen. They could reach Naukan over land by hiking across the steep mountains and ravines. In the 1980s, one of them, Lyuda Tuluqaa, a young girl at the time of the relocation, came to be a "master of Naukan" of sorts. She frequented the old village during the summer time, maintained order in the sole standing cabin, and tended to the old graves. Her actions were then the sole symbol of the Yupik presence at the abandoned site.

The closure of Ungaziq

That same year, 1958, a similar fate befell another Yupik community, Ungaziq at Cape Chaplin, known by that time under its Russian name "Chaplino." This area, the site a flourishing Yupik village of some 500 at its peak around 1900 (Bogoras 1904: 29), was home to the largest Aboriginal community on the Chukchi Peninsula and was the key nod to the age-old Siberian Yupik connections with the residents of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska. As in the case of Naukan, all contacts with the Alaskan Yupik population were banned with the outbreak of the Cold War in 1948; still, the memories of regular travels and ties with the island Yupik kin were very much alive.

Many of the elements in the narratives of the closing of, and relocation from, Ungaziq we recorded were almost a carbon copy of the events in Naukan: rumours of a looming natural catastrophe threatening the village; pressure from the authorities; the selection by the residents of a convenient site for a new village, and their subsequent relocation to a different place:

They came from the district with all their talk [of relocation], who, I don't remember. Anyway, there was a meeting, they got together, and went and picked out a spot. And all the residents decided that it would be best to build down from hills, on the northern side [of Cape Chaplin]. Because the hunting was good on the northern side there. Well that's what they decided. [...] The district authorities had proposed Tkachen [Bay] at the time. They said it's a good bay, it was calm and there was easy access to it. But they [the Eskimo] decided, here's how they put it, that that bay was a "dead bay." There were no sea animals there. I was present at that meeting. And I remember that phrase, "dead bay." I left in 1955, and they decided to relocate to the northern side (Aleksandra Sokolovskaya 1987).

As in Naukan, the decision to leave the ancestral village was a difficult one. But the choice people made for their new community to be built on the northern site, near the old village of Tefleq some 10-12 km away, was a reasonable compromise. It was a familiar place, to which the residents of Ungaziq, used to move their houses during the lean years, the last time in the 1910s and 1920s. Moving there would guarantee the continuous use of

the familiar territory. So, when relocation became inevitable, the first two families from Ungaziq wintered in Teflleq in 1957-1958.

The beginning of housing construction in summer 1958 at the site in Tkachen Bay that people rejected a few years earlier caused an outburst of dissatisfaction, even resistance. But the community bonds and general passivity quickly won the upper hand:

At first people didn't consent to move to Tkachen because of the long distance required to hunt. Yagwa and Anuqen [elderly boat captains] got together and refused to move here. Because it was so far to hunt. But in the end they did agree, and the site was chosen. Because even though they refused, nothing could be done about it. Because of the surf in Ungaziq, they said, heavy surf. It would at some point suddenly flood the village. They were afraid (Kavighaaq 1987).

Eventually, the transfer of the village to the "dead" Tkachen Bay, so poorly suited for hunting, was not perceived as the end of the community. A role was obviously played by the degree to which the residents of Ungaziq had been already drawn into the orbit of the nearby Russian town of Provideniya, with its port, modern services and the district administration. Moving to the Tkachen Bay made that connection so much easier. Again, in comparison with Naukan, the people all moved together within their historical territory and the relocation from Ungaziq was better organized:

Our move took two years: the first people moved in 1958, and we went in 1959. Living space was assigned at the collective farm by an application process. People would move as soon as their building was completed. Each family knew where it was going in advance. People would always move on Saturdays and Sundays, by whaleboat. Their belongings went by car (Kura 1987).

Nonetheless, parting from the old village and one's home was a difficult experience:

In the morning I was walking along the shore, I had been cooking. They ran up and told me, after lunch, in the late afternoon, a whaleboat would come for us. And move us, while the weather was still good. And that was all there was to it: we quickly got ready and went down to the shore. We even left the laundry, our clothing, and the dogs. We even left the soup standing there. When we left it was already dark, and there was a dense fog. A whole whaleboat full, with small children. [...] The man at the rudder didn't sit down from the time we left Ungaziq, because water was pouring in. We sat on our belongings, but there was other people's stuff too, from people who had already gone (Kavighaaq 1987).

After ten-hour travel, a new village under construction opened before their eyes:

The school was already finished, and the store was ready. And the children even set out for school. New houses were being built. They weren't done yet. They gave us ours for November 7th¹³. We moved in to our new place just in time for the holiday, the plastering wasn't even done. We quickly hung wallpaper and celebrated. The electricity was on already (Kavighaaq 1987).

¹³ November 7th was the main state holiday of the USSR at the time.

Indeed, the people of Ungaziq were fortunate, as they moved their whole community, including their village council and collective farm. At the new location, those in charge saw to providing housing and work for the settlers. The village collective farm and its Russian chairman, Ilyin, were the key social force involved in moving the people and getting them settled. The residents of Ungaziq also received more assistance from the state, compared to the Naukan exiles. The new village in Tkachen Bay, which in 1960 received the official name "New Chaplino," was *their* site to stay. No traditional Yupik institutions, such as clans, boat crews, kin groups ever figured in the elders' recollections of the relocation. As a result, the territorial basis of the village of Ungaziq, with its structure of old clan sites and neighbourhoods was not restored at the new site. For some, the new village probably did fit the image of the future life (Figure 2), if judged by the written narrative of one of the Yupik activists of the time, under the symbolic title *Nash rodnoi Ungazik* ('Our beloved Ungazik'):

Now our village has a new name, New Chaplino. And it is indeed new, for nothing of the old is left. All the Eskimos live in pretty, comfortable frame houses. The village looks smart. A big school has been built. Now pupils live in the boarding school, supported completely by the state. Preschoolers attend nurseries and kindergartens that are paid for by the government. The village has a good store and a post office. Soon there will be a hospital. The collective farm has built a ranch, and is raising blue fox. A culture centre has been built and a large, mechanised processing facility [for marine mammals] has been built" (Aivangu 1985[1961]: 56).

Contrary to Aivangu's statements, Tkachen Bay proved to be a "dead site" for the Yupik marine economy as the bustling construction effort turned former hunters into unskilled labourers:

In Ungaziq we had six of our crews: those of Utgga, Ayanga, Pikesaq, Utataawen, Silleqa, and Yatelen, all older, experienced boat captains. When the people of Qiwaag were relocated [to Ungaziq] in 1952, there were ten crews altogether. And when we were moved to Tkachen, only five were left. Nothing was right, somehow. I didn't hunt any more myself. And the others, too, were largely in construction. [...] Their crews were ended [disbanded], and everyone was put into construction. I resumed hunting only in 1965. At that time there were only two crews for all of [New] Chaplino: Naptaq's and mine (Tagitutkaq 1981 in Krupnik 2000: 218).

When we visited both Nunyamo and New Chaplino in summer 1971, the feeling of depression and homesickness for the ancestral sites was common to both. At the site of the deserted village at Cape Chaplin, a polar station, a border post, and a Russian military unit remained. The remains of abandoned houses were vandalised, and the village rapidly fell into disrepair. At the time of our visits to Ungaziq in the 1970s, the place left a dreadful impression. The house ruins had turned into garbage heaps. Rusty oil drums and abandoned equipment were strewn everywhere; the ground was covered with tractor tracks. The border guards had dug trenches cutting across the old village in case of an "American invasion." The old cemetery was a wreck. The former residents were prohibited from visiting; the few who managed the trip returned with tales of desolation. In New Chaplino, people were sick and depressed over the state of their home village:



Figure 1. Abandoned Yupik houses in Naukan, summer 1981. Photo: Sergei Bogoslovskiy.



Figure 2. The street in the village of New Chaplino, summer 1976. Photo: Yuri Rodnyi.

You could tell, people were already homesick. Of course, I lived there [in Ungaziq], we left our home, although there was heavy surf there. We were still getting used to the location in Tkachen, but once people got their new houses, there was nothing for it. I wasn't going to stay on by myself, I was used to living with everyone else. I haven't set foot in Ungaziq since 1959. Someone brought up the idea of going there this summer, but I declined (Kavighaaq 1987).

Fifty years after the relocation, only a handful of people retain vivid memories of the village at Cape Chaplin cast in a distinctly nostalgic tone. Of course, the middle-aged and the younger generation that grew up in Tkachen Bay consider that site their home. What the residents of New Chaplino do share in common is the memory of the trauma they experienced together, a decision once taken by the community that left no room for individual choice.

The Plover tragedy

On May 25, 1957, an avalanche of snow and rocks thundered down from the mountain slope onto the 300-strong community in Plover Bay, a small cove named after the HMS *Plover* that wintered in 1848-1849 in the nearby Provideniya Bay. It claimed the lives of seven Russian border guards and eight Yupik residents, including five children (Krupnik 2000: 83, 85). The authorities quickly used the tragedy as the pretext for closing the village and the local *Ploverskyi morzverkombinat* ('Plover marine mammal factory'), the main employer to the community.

The village in Plover Bay called 'Plover' in Russian (Aslleq in Yupik) was built in the 1930s and 1940s around the marine mammal factory. It was a genuine product of Soviet modernisation policies and had a mixed population of some 350, made of the former Yupik residents from various nearby communities, as well as several Chukchi, and Russian families. The closing put the final blow to the local Yupik group, the Avatmiit, who made the majority in the village. Having endured the loss of their historical hub of Avan in 1941 and the eviction from Ureliki in 1948 (see above), the Avatmiit caught hold in Plover as a last site within their old territory. The relocation thus aborted the last chance for consolidation of the group that was trying to re-gain its roots in Plover Bay.

The closing of the village was carried out without any consultations with its residents, even symbolic, as in the case of Naukan and Ungaziq. The authorities simply shut down the factory that had been in operation since the 1930s, and by decree, transferred it to the nearby town of Provideniya, some 10 km further up the Provideniya Bay fjord.

The Plover marine mammal factory was a lifeline to the village economy. It housed a small flotilla of cutters and motorboats, processed the blubber and hides of walrus and seals hunted in the nearby communities, and repaired their whaleboats and outboard motors. When it was shut down, the employees, Yupik, Chukchi, and Russians alike were transferred to new jobs in Provideniya. Here they received new

living quarters, again, by administrative assignment. Even before this, came the closings of the school, the store, and the local clinic. The village was simply commanded out of existence, and it died without any resistance. By the early 1960s, only two Yupik families stayed on, guarding the deserted warehouses and ageing equipment. Soon they were gone as well (Krupnik 2000: 84-85).

In Provideniya the former residents of Plover shared the fate of other Native families who had settled there during the preceding decades. Here they were a scarcely noticeable minority among the rapidly expanding town population made of Russians and other newcomers. In the 1960s, Provideniya experienced a construction boom; its population had reached 6,000. Life in Provideniya was oriented towards the modern port, the nearby military installations, various district and municipal services, all dominated by the newcomers. Most former residents of Plover could in no way fit into this world and they were simply put adrift.

The newly constructed headquarters for the relocated Plover Bay factory in Provideniya were officially closed down in the late 1960s, less than a decade after the Plover avalanche. Its Yupik employees were out of work again. Families with able-bodied men preferred to resettle to the Yupik communities of Sireniki and New Chaplino. Their higher professional qualifications obtained at Plover and in Provideniya helped them adapt smoothly. By and large the men worked with the new technology, such as small village generators, telephone stations, boilers, and blubber-melting equipment. Many joined village hunting crews, again, as mechanics and motor operators. The women took qualified positions at village sewing workshops, fox-farms, and boarding schools.

Among those who remained in Provideniya, the elderly, the unemployed, and single families now predominated. The town authorities, concerned by the high rate of alcoholism and social disorders among this group, began to parcel the troublemakers into the nearby villages. The Native population of Provideniya soon shrank from 300-400 to 150-200, that is, from 7% to 3% of the town residents, in 1975 (Volfson 1979). When we surveyed the Yupik families in Provideniya in 1975, they were made primarily of retirees, teachers and low-level personnel of the town's boarding school, kindergarten, hospital, and other municipal services. These people were town dwellers, who could not even visit their old site in Plover Bay out of Provideniya, due to the lack of overland route and to the regulations imposed by the Russian border-guards that prohibited the town residents from owning private motorboats. Because of the restricted access, the abandoned village in Plover long remained a phantom place. Even in the mid-1980s one would see ruins of deserted homes, repair shops, and the hulls of cutters brought onto the spit. History had run a complete cycle at this site. A hundred-odd record of serving as the key destination to the early explorers, Yankee whalers, Russian patrol boats, and many science expeditions¹⁴, Plover Bay, again, was laid uninhabited, as the group of "Plover Eskimos" was dispersed and ceased to exist.

¹⁴ Besides several whaling ships, the Plover Bay was visited by the naturalists Krause brothers and Edward Nelson in 1881 and by the Harriman's Expedition in 1899.

Epilogue

A short final comment is needed to put the Yupik relocations during the Soviet era in perspective. Of course, any involuntary resettlement inflicts trauma upon those who were forced to move. Nonetheless, the sheer number of the Yupik families that were uprooted and moved by the state in just two years, 1958-1959 was staggering. Two-thirds of the small nation, about 800 people out of the total population of 1,200, suddenly found themselves as "displaced people" on their land, many even for two generations running. Many families had changed their place of residence three to four times over a few decades (Figure 3), often with no chance to revisit their home sites. This was a trying experience. Perhaps, only the Caribou Inuit of the Canadian Keewatin Region underwent relocation on as overall a scale as befell the Yupik people in Chukotka. Also, the level of control, to which the displaced Yupik families have been subjected, was unprecedented, as they were banned from owning private motorboats, snowmobiles, subsistence travelling or hunting at their will¹⁵.

Not only the sheer scope of relocation but also its very target left people bewildered. One could, to a certain extent, internalise the logic of the state actions in closing smaller villages and distant outposts, or in bringing nomadic families to sedentary life by free housing and employment in large modernised settlements. But the villages of Naukan, Ungaziq, and Plover that were closed in 1958-1959 were *the* magnet hubs for such policies. Their residents were the most active bearers of the Soviet ideology of modernisation; nevertheless, it was these largest and most modernised communities that were uprooted.

One of the chief consequences of the era of relocations was the physical and psychological breaking of the "Eskimo land" in Asia into a few small clusters. The Yupik worldview always assumed the existence of neighbours—with a similar language, established kin ties, frequent visits, and mutual assistance. This idealised image of the Yupik land as a chain of connected tribal, and later, village council territories, had passed into the past. The fledgling Yupik "nation" was now broken into a few unrelated segments and all contacts among the few remaining communities took place by travelling through the Russian administrative centres and major airport hubs. The shock from the forced relocations and the shutting of old villages curtailed people's ability to resist other governmental actions that fell upon them in the 1960s, such as taking Native children to the state-run boarding schools, the installment of outsiders as bosses at every level, the closing of Indigenous language programs at schools, and the like.

All communities in Chukotka of the post-relocation era were mixed, in terms that they were now made of the Native exiles from numerous old villages, Yupik and Chukchi alike, and the Russian newcomers. The values of former lives, reliance upon marine hunting,

¹⁵ According to our survey of the community of New Chaplino in 1987, a few private snowmobiles in local possession arrived in 1985 only. No Native family owned a personal vehicle or a motorboat, though dog-teams were used by hunters for winter transportation. Snowmobiles, private boats, and motorcycles became common in the 1990s, when the Yupik families were allowed to travel on their subsistence activities and to visit St. Lawrence Island by boat.



Figure 3. A group of the Yupik residents of New Chaplino (fall 1979), each with a long personal story of relocations. Left to right: Qiiwutkaq (1912-1998, born in Avan, moved to Ureliki around 1938, to Plover in 1948, to Provideniya in 1959, and to New Chaplino around 1970); Vassili Sivughtekaq (1936-1985, born in Avan, moved to Ureliki in 1940, to Plover in 1948, to Provideniya in 1959, and to New Chaplino around 1970); Rentenga (1925-1996, born in Qiiwaq, moved to Ungaziq in 1950, and to New Chaplino in 1959); Qura (1915-1990, born in Ungaziq, moved to New Chaplino in 1959); and Numengaawen (1915-1984, born in Siqlluk, moved to Ungaziq in 1950, and to New Chaplino in 1959). Photo: Levon Abrahamian.

attachment to the ancestral lands, were all but nullified by the state. To an even greater degree, the ideals that had been espoused in the first decades of the Soviet administration were profaned: faith in the benevolent care of the state, in the village council system as a form of self-government, and in voting and resolutions as acts that had real social force.

Soviet/Russian officials never acknowledged the damage done to the Yupik nation or to other Siberian Indigenous peoples by the state relocations of the 1950s. No apologies were offered and no restitutions were made to compensate for the loss of land and property or for the emotional traumas inflicted. Unlike some other tragedies that befell the Soviet citizens—like the enforced collectivization, massive purges that sent millions to the labour camps or the deportation of entire nations—Siberian Indigenous relocations were never subjected to scholarly studies, media coverage, museum exhibits, or survivors' activism. There was no Soviet/Russian equivalent to the public acknowledgement of *Tammarniit* ('Mistakes', see Tester and Kulchyski 1994), no public hearings to award compensation, as in Canada (Anonymous 1999), and no Prime Minister's apology, as in Denmark to the Thule Inuit. In fact, the Soviet-era policies of relocations were never renounced, so that no mechanism was put in place to prevent them from happening again. The threat of new relocations, actually, remained a constant factor. Upon every new visit to Chukotka between 1971 and 1990, we were greeted with yet another governmental plan to close another Native community and to move its residents elsewhere. Fortunately, Indigenous people were spared further relocations in the decades, following the closing of Nunyamo in 1977 (see Chichlo 1981). They were left alone even during the worst era of the 1990s, when several Russian mining towns in Chukotka were abandoned and their residents were ordered to leave.

Still, the threat of village closing was always on the authorities' agenda, as seen from a letter that arrived from the area capital of Anadyr in summer 2007:

Dear [name withheld],

[...] Our native village of Snezhnoe in the Anadyr District is up for closing. Some officials from the Area Government in Anadyr and also from Moscow, we don't know who they were, visited the village recently. They have told people, without any explanation, that they better start packing. They were offered new residence in the villages of Kanchalan, Krasneno, Khatyrka, even in the central areas of Russia. The residents of Snezhnoe at their village meeting decided to write a letter to the Governor. No one wants to move from the ancestral land. Please advise us to whom else they should write, so that their pleas are heard and the village is left alone. My parents live there; they do not want to move either, just would like to live peacefully in their homeland [name of author withheld].

It looks like that the saga of the Yupik relocations in the 1950s is not "old history" anymore. It should be remembered and revisited if the people of Snezhnoe are to stay in their homeland.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Lyudmila Bogoslovskaya, Yvon Csonka, Peter Schweitzer, and Michael Krauss for encouraging us to make the story of the Soviet Yupik relocations public knowledge. Nina Aquen (1934-2005), Kura (1915-1990), Kaviighaq (1914-1991), Lyudmila Ainana (Aynganga, b. 1934), Alekasandra Sokolovskaia (1932-?), Zoia Nenlunkina (1950-?), Olga Mumightekaq (1933-2000?), U.I. Ughsima (1915-1989), Georgii Menovshchikov (1911-1991), and numerous other local witnesses helped by sharing their memories and narratives. Our fieldwork partners, Yuri Rodnyi (1976), Sergei Bogoslovskiy (1981), and Levon Abrahamian (1979), offered their photographs as illustrations. Steven D. Jones was instrumental in translating the original Russian manuscript in 1993-1994, upon which this article is compiled. We thank them all.

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80/I. KRUPNIK AND M. CHLENOV

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